

**West Mojave Plan  
Task Group 2  
April 24, 2002  
Green Tree Inn, Victorville**

**Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Jim Arbogast	CORVA	Eddie Phillips	AFFA
Drew Ashley	Public	MaryAnne Phillips	AFFA
Marie Brashear	CDC, SPCW	Darrell Readmond	ETI
Mike Connor	Tortoise Interest Grps.	Bob Sackett	Desert Vipers M/C
Jeri Ferguson	Cal 4-Wheel Drive	Ron Schiller	HDMUC
Jennifer Foster	Public Lands/ Use	Joe Schuster	CORVA
Ken Foster	BCHC Borrego Spr.	Peg Schuster	CORVA
Martin Gill	CORDR	Chuck Scolastico	S.B.Co.- Co.Council
Harold Johnson	BLM Barstow	Robert W. Smith	S.B. Co.- BOS
Ted Kalil	VValley 4 Wheelers	Debbie Stevens	AVTREC
Paul Kober	CORVA	Robert Strub	Trona
Carol Landry	Public Lands/ Use	Mike Sturdy	AFFA
Paul Littlecoyote	Native Americans	Barbara Veale	People for USA
Sophia Merk	Public	Jim Wilson	Lost Coyotes MC
Lorelei Oviatt	Kern County Planning	Chuck Williams	Public
Doug Parham	WSBCLA	Hector Villalobos	BLM Ridgecrest
Joe Pendleton	Desert Survivors		

**West Mojave Team:** Bill Haigh, Larry LaPre, Valery Pilmer, Les Weeks.

**Introductions**

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 6:20 PM and introductions were made. Haigh asked whether corrections to the meeting notes for March 21, 2002 are needed. Doug Parham asked for clarification of the comment made in the notes that recreation is a resource. Harold Johnson indicated that recreation is recognized by FLPMA as a resource, and added that public lands have a value to people as a source of recreation. Ron Schiller asked that his name be added to the list of attendees. Haigh asked that any additional changes be e-mailed to him.

**Overview of Route Designation Approach**

Bill Haigh described the status of the route designation effort. Haigh explained that there are two steps in the process: first, designate routes as either open, limited or closed; and second, amend the BLM's California Desert Conservation Area Plan (Desert Plan) through the West Mojave planning effort so that the Desert Plan includes the network of open and limited motorized vehicle

routes. Since the Desert Plan was adopted in 1980, BLM has designated routes in a number of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (e.g. Afton Canyon, Rainbow Basin), and for large areas outside of the ACECs (in 1985 and 1987). None of these have yet been incorporated into the Desert Plan. As a result of new circumstances which have arisen since the mid-1980s, in particular the listing of the desert tortoise in 1990, a new designation process is being conducted throughout the desert tortoise DWMAs and other sensitive biological areas, based upon the motorized vehicle route field surveys conducted between September 2001 and March 2002. Once this designation process is completed it will be incorporated into the Desert Plan, together with the ACEC designations and what remains of the 1985 and 1987 network. The following discussion took place:

- Mike Connor asked whether the Rand Mountain/ Fremont Valley Management Plan would be revisited. Bill Haigh indicated that the route designation accomplished by that plan would not be redone, but rather would be brought forward and incorporated into the BLM's Desert Plan. Connor stated that language within the Rand Plan requires reconsideration of the plan in light of the designation of critical habitat for the desert tortoise. Connor indicated that at a previous Steering Committee and Task Group 1 meeting, Tim Salt had stated this area would be reviewed. Haigh noted that he will look into this issue further, but does not agree with Connor's interpretation. Connor indicated he would like to see in writing how the BLM intends to address this issue.
- Eddie Phillips stated that roads which have been closed and mulched should be mapped as part of the effort as they may be RS2477 routes. He feels that if these are not on the map, it is not a true and correct map. Les Weeks noted that route designation does not impact a valid RS2477 claim. Marie Brashear noted that she has seen roads mulched since the BLM - Center for Biological Diversity stipulations began to be implemented that may not have been included in the route inventory (i.e., Ords). Bill Haigh asked that any specifics be provided to Les Weeks. Jeri Ferguson indicated that if route closures had gone through the National Environmental Policy Act process previously, the survey teams did not go on the route, however, the interim closure areas were mapped by the teams. Jim Wilson indicated that the motorcycle survey crews may have mapped some of these routes if they were entered from the non-mulched end. Wilson added he is satisfied that the maps are correct. Bob Strub added that the crews did not survey a road if it was signed as private property or if it was signed closed.

Bill Haigh added that Federal Register notices have been published for previously designated routes. The West Mojave Plan will provide a second step and incorporate these previously designated routes into the desert plan. New route designations will take place only in the intensive survey areas.

- Mike Connor asked how the Ord Subregion would be handled. Haigh indicated that the preferred alternative would be brought forward through the West Mojave Plan for inclusion in the BLM's Desert Plan. Bob Sackett noted that there were many comments

made that there was not good connectivity through the Ords. It was noted that comments submitted during the environmental review of the Ords would be considered during the West Mojave Plan process, or individuals can resubmit their comments if they wish. Marie Brashear noted that the group reviewing the Ords did not reach consensus and that some parties had walked out of the process. Jeri Ferguson agreed and indicated that Cal 4 Wheel had walked out. Harold Johnson added that a federal Record of Decision was never signed for the Ord subregion.

- Sam Merk asked that Darwin's water pipeline, Darwin's secondary access for emergency usage and the Inyo County transfer station south of Owen's Lake be shown on the map.
- An individual asked that single track routes be signed for motorcycles only. He indicated that the Forest Service does this.
- It was noted that the Open Areas would not be altered through the West Mojave Plan.
- Ron Schiller asked that the map displaying the route designation status be posted on the West Mojave web site. Bill Haigh agreed to do so. Jeri Ferguson noted that the areas already designated will be open for comment through the NEPA process, and people need to be aware of this and review those routes as well.
- Lorelei Oviatt stated that given the time frame mandated for the plan, it is important to focus on the critical areas. She feels it is impossible to complete a full effort in all areas given the time frame and supports the approach outlined by Bill Haigh.
- Debbie Stevens asked how equestrians will be affected if an equestrian trail has been identified as a motorcycle route and closed and mulched as a result of the plan. Harold Johnson reminded the group that equestrians can go wherever they want within the plan area, including wilderness areas. Stevens feels there needs to be another process for equestrian trails as they are difficult to differentiate from motorcycle trails. It was noted that this effort is for the purpose of identifying and designating motor vehicle access routes, not equestrian trails.
- Eddie Phillips asked whether all vertically mulched routes had received NEPA review. Harold Johnson indicated that the work in the Ords had received environmental review. Hector Villalobos indicated that the Ridgecrest office has been doing vertical mulching on roads into wilderness areas, also in Jawbone ACEC and Rand ACEC. Villalobos noted that there is no environmental assessment for the area immediately around Ridgecrest, however, in that area the office worked closely with the community and were responding to concerns from the area residents. Jeri Ferguson noted that she objects to the restoration that occurred around Ridgecrest without NEPA review and comment.

### **Decision Tree, Designation Forms and Schedule**

Les Weeks discussed the route designation process currently being conducted for the subregions located within the Tortoise DWMAs. He referred the group to the route designation decision tree handed out. Weeks indicated that the definition of “redundant route” is important, and noted that not all parallel routes are redundant. Parallel routes may support different usage which makes them unique. Weeks indicated that the route designation team is starting by identifying the primary route network, and noted that the designation process within the DWMAs needs to be completed by May 15, 2002. Weeks noted that a glossary of terms used in the designation process is being developed and will be provided to the group at a later date. Part of the process includes documenting the decision made for each route, including any special circumstances not included in the decision tree. It was recognized that the decision tree will not work in all instances, and in those cases, specific documentation for why the decision was made is important. Weeks further noted that the data captured during the inventory provides most of the information needed to answer the questions on the chart. The following points were raised during the discussion of this item:

- Mike Connor asked whether private property owners would be asked if they want a route provided to their property. Harold Johnson noted that during the previous designation effort, representatives from the county indicated that they wanted to see roads going to private property kept open. Chuck Scolastico indicated that San Bernardino County would like to have a representative involved in the process, as the road issue is very important issue to them. Les Weeks indicated that representation from the county on the subcommittee which is working with staff would be appreciated.
- Bob Strub asked that the group consider creating a new road to replace a road closed because it goes through high quality habitat.
- Les Weeks described Motorized Access Zones (MAZ) as a portion of a subregion which have common characteristics (i.e., similar uses). Dividing the subregions this way helps make the designation job more manageable. Weeks noted that the group also reviews the designations on a more regional basis to ensure connectivity and consistency in the designation process.
- Harold Johnson indicated that while he is frustrated by the time frames involved, he feels the designation process is working quite well. He noted that all the relevant information is on the maps, and that they have to work through the process route by route. Documentation forms are filled out as the recommendation is made.
- Eddie Phillips asked that utility easements not be treated as public access. The concern is that these could be restricted by the utility in the future, without an alternative route being provided. Harold Johnson noted that very few utilities are granted an exclusive easement over public land, therefore these easements are open to public use.

- Sam Merk asked that the term “impact habitat” be used in lieu of “ cross sensitive habitat.”
- Ron Schiller made the following four points: 1) He would like to see a question dealing with recreation use. 2) Frequency of use of a route needs to be considered. 3) Season of used needs to be considered. 4) Need to consider adjacent protected areas as mitigation for impacts (e.g., El Paso Mountain Wilderness as mitigation for raptors & cultural for the rest of the El Pasos).
- Bob Sackett asked that the potential harm to a species be considered if a route is closed (e.g., guzzler access).
- Paul Kober asked that the recreational value of a route be considered, and noted that utility routes typically have low recreational value. Les Weeks noted that the definition for “redundant route” takes the need for different types of recreation into consideration. Harold Johnson noted that utility corridors often help in providing access to areas with recreational value.
- Doug Parham asked that the route’s impact on private residences (noise, dust, etc.) be considered.
- Martin Gill asked that the team make certain that like duplicate routes are not treated equally such that both may be unnecessarily closed. Les Weeks responded that the team cannot look at the maps myopically, but has to look at the process in a regional context as well.
- Marie Brashear noted three issues: 1) That more emphasis needs to be placed on the use of “limited” routes. She feels that this should be considered during designation, and not tagged on at the end. 2) That the routes need to be reviewed by the archaeologists, range cons, etc., to ensure that all issues are addressed up front, so that the process doesn’t need to be redone later. 3) Need to check and see where all the guzzlers are and ensure that access to them remains open.
- Jim Wilson asked that the term MAZ be defined. Bill Haigh responded that the MAZs are a geographic subdivision of the subregions. Weeks added that the MAZs were developed based on a manageable sized area with similar issues and uses.
- Lorelei Oviatt had the following suggestions: 1) Insert the word “primary” and “secondary” in the second tier questions. 2) Define “dispersed use, etc.”. 3) Add recreational value to the decision tree. 4) Clarify that Caveat #3 is really just a re-look at the decision. 5) Make certain that the definitions (i.e., “high value habitat”) and process is clearly bought off on by the wildlife agencies.
- Mike Connor indicated that the decision tree does not include consideration of multiple

species issues. He recommended that a route that passes through habitat of multiple species be given a higher priority for closure than one that passes through the habitat of a single species. Connor added that the route system needs to address the recovery of species (e.g., cumulative impacts).

- Bob Strub provided the following comments: 1) Need to assess the quality of access to private land. Some access routes may have a higher level of legal standing than others (e.g., private easements, granted rights-of-way). 2) Consider new construction as an alternate to closing a road (avoid habitat). 3) Roads serving several private lots should be considered more important than roads that serve a single private property. Mike Connor added that section line roads don't go through individual properties which is an advantage.
- Eddie Phillips asked that the plan protect access in the future, (e.g., an organization buys up land and closes access) as the conservation strategy/acquisition process is implemented. He would like to see a policy of "close one- open one."
- Mike Connor noted that since the West Mojave Plan will be buying private lands in the Tortoise DWMA, access to those parcels won't be necessary. Martin Gill suggested looking at areas where private land has been acquired to see if routes which provided access to those parcels could be closed.
- Jeri Ferguson noted that high value habitat needs to be clearly defined. She indicated that it will be important to see Ed LaRue's latest tortoise maps for comparison to the route designation. She also noted that the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan does not meet today's criteria for such plans and did not go through the NEPA process. Bill Haigh noted that the Recovery Plan provides recovery guidelines for the planning effort.
- Jeri Ferguson and Marie Brashear asked that all forms and information for the route designation process be included in the plan or plan appendices.
- Lorelei Oviatt indicated that staff needs to look at the tortoise prescriptions regarding no new roads in the DWMA. This comment was in reference to Bob Strub's request for consideration of construction of new roads to replace closed roads. Bill Haigh stated that he believes the plan reference is to no new paved roads. Oviatt asked that this be resurrected and reconsidered.
- Ron Schiller asked who will own the land when purchased for mitigation. He noted that mitigation land cannot be used for other purposes, including recreation. Marie Brashear stated that for the BLM to take ownership of such lands, changes to legislation would be required.
- An individual asked that the plan provide continuing protection for access approved by the

Plan.

- Mike Connor expressed concern about what he sees as contradictions in the route decision tree (i.e., dispersed use vs contiguous blocks). He indicated that it is not clear what the advantage of dispersed use is and indicated that it seems to conflict with the question regarding the need to conserve large contiguous blocks of habitat. Connor also asked that Footnote #1 regarding “above-average tortoise sign or in washes” be clarified (i.e., is this a good thing or not).

### **Next Meeting Date**

Bill Haigh noted that scoping meetings on the plan are tentatively scheduled for the latter part of May and first part of June. Haigh asked whether the group would like an additional meeting prior to the scoping meetings. Jeri Ferguson asked that the working groups receive a copy of the preferred alternative prior to the scoping meeting so that meaningful comments can be provided. Lorelei Oviatt stated that she does not believe the task groups can meet once the scoping meetings have begun.

The next meeting date was set for Tuesday, May 15, 2002 at 6:00 PM. The group will be notified of the location for the meeting. [Note: The meeting site was later set for the Ramada Inn, Victorville.]

The following additional comments regarding route designation were provided prior to adjournment:

- Jim Arbogast asked that connectivity between open areas be considered.
- Mike Connor asked that an electronic copy of the route inventory be made available.
- Ted Kalil asked whether a sunset clause can be inserted into the route closure process. Bill Haigh noted that land use plans are revisited periodically to ensure they continue to make sense.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.